

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DRC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MRN 4410 VICE 5410)

THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAMS WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO
BOMBAY AND MADRAS 20 MAR 1978 AND IS REPEATED FOR YOUR
INFORMATION.

QUOTE:

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CALCUTTA 0470

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: MRS. GANDHI'S MARCH 18 VISIT TO CALCUTTA

1. MRS. GANDHI ADDRESSED A CROWD ESTIMATED AT FOUR
TO FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON, AT THE
CALCUTTA MAIDAN. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE ANTI-GANDHI
DEMNSTRATION IN NEIGHBORING STREETS, AND THE CROWD
WAS NOT ENTIRELY ORDERLY, MOST OF THE UNRULINESS THAT
DELAYED THE START OF THE SPEECH BY ABOUT AN HOUR WAS DUE
TO AN EXCESS OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE FORMER PM, RATHER
THAN HOSTILITY.

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2. ATTRACTING A CROWD OF THIS SIZE WAS A SUCCESS FOR
CONGRESS (I), AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO HELP THE INDIRISTS
IN STATE INTRA-CONGRESS POLITICS. THE PRINCIPAL ORGANIZERS
WERE GHANI KHAN CHAUDHURI, PRANAB MUKHERJEE, AND
SUBRATA MUKHERJEE. OBSERVERS NOTED THAT THE CROWD
WAS RELATIVELY SPONTANEOUS, IN THE SENSE THAT ONLY

ABOUT 20 PERCENT CAME IN PROCESSION CONTINGENTS. ABOUT HALF THOSE PRESENT APPEARED TO BE BENGALI, WITH A HIGH PROPORTION OF MUSLIMS AND MIDDLE CLASS YOUTH AMONG THEM. THE OTHER HALF-A SURPRISINGLY LARGE PROPORTION-LOOKED TO BE HINDI-SPEAKERS, AND THIS WAS THOUGHT TO BE OF SOME INDICATIVE VALUE CONCERNING MRS. GANDHI'S STANDING IN THE STATES HIGHER ON THE GANGES. SHE GAVE HER SPEECH IN A SANSKRITIC RATHER THAN AN URDUIZED HINDI, QUITE INTELLIGIBLE TO BENGALIS, ALTHOUGH SHE DID NOT EXCITE THE CROWD WITH ORATORICAL EFFECTS.

3. MRS. GANDHI OPENED HER 55-MINUTE TALK WITH A REFERENCE TO HER APPEARANCE IN 1972 ON THE CALCUTTA MAIDAN WITH MUJIBUR RAHMAN (WHICH ATTRACTED POSSIBLY THE LARGEST CROWD EVER THERE). SHE THEN LAUNCHED INTO WHAT IN THE READING APPEARED TO BE A HARD HITTING ATTACK ON ALLEGED JANATA CAPITALIST POLICIES, INDECISION, AND CONCESSIONS TO BANGLADESH ON FARAKKA, AND ON THE PUSHING BACK OF EMIGRES, SOME OF WHOM HAD BEEN KILLED. SHE ALSO ATTACKED WHAT SHE SAID WAS NEGLECT OF THE POOR AND BACKWARD SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION, AS WELL AS A DRIFT AWAY FROM NON-ALIGNMENT, AND OPENNESS TO FOREIGN INFLUENCE. OBSERVERS HERE ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY HER "CLEVER" ABSTENTION FROM CRITICISM OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CPM, ALTHOUGH SHE ASKED HOW THE CPM COULD COOPERATE WITH THE JANATA SHE HAD JUST CASTIGATED, AND MENTIONED THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CPM'S ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT ELECTORAL APPEAL AND THE GOWB'S CURRENT STYLE OF GOVERNING. ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN ADVANCE PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE SPECTACULAR PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS DURING HER VISIT, PRESUMABLY ABOUT DEFECTIONS OF WELL KNOWN FIGURES TO CONGRESS (I), NOTHING OF THE SORT APPEARS TO HAVE OCCURED.

4. DURING THE VISIT, MRS. GANDHI HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE AT WHICH IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, SHE SAID SHE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THE BHUTTO VERDICT WAS A FAIR ONE OR NOT. SHE ALSO MET WITH THE CONGRESS (I) STATE COMMITTEE, A GROUP OF LAWYERS, AND A GROUP OF "INTELLECTUALS", WHILE SHE WAS HERE, AND RETURNED TO NEW DELHI ON THE EVENING OF THE SAME DAY.
PERKINS UNQUOTE
GOHEEN

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